HILDERBAY TAPE LOADING AID

The ESSENTIAL accessory for microcomputer users!

Loading programs from tape is a very common source of trouble. If the program fails to load, is the recording bad? Or is your tape player unsuitable? Or was the volume just set at the wrong position for the tape you are trying to load? This is particularly troublesome if each test takes six minutes!

The Hilderbay Loading Aid

* allows you to get the volume just right first time -- every time!

* will usually find dropouts (the signal becomes fainter for a very short time, often too short to hear) -- sometimes it will even help you to load from a tape with dropouts!

* can be used to compare the quality of different makes of tape.

* can be used to locate tape files on tapes containing several files.

* is far more useful than an active audio interface device as you can actually see what is happening!

To use the Hilderbay Loading Aid (HLA): plug the EAR lead from the tape recorder into the HLA, and plug the HLA's plug into the EAR socket of your computer. Load a program you know to be good in your usual way, and take a note of the meter reading. Repeat the process at different volumes until you have established the range of meter readings. Having done this once, you can set the volume right for any tape you want to load. You would normally play the tape without instructing the computer to load. After setting the volume with the meter, rewind the tape to the beginning of the program and load it in the normal way.

With some tape recorders the meter reading will increase with the volume control setting up to a certain position; the meter reading will not increase beyond this. A suitable volume setting for such machines is often just before the meter reading stops changing.

The circuit of the HLA is designed to give a constant reading with computer tapes (this is certainly true for ZX81, Apple, PET tapes). If the tape has a dropout, it will usually show up as a sudden dip on the meter. In some cases it is actually possible to load such a tape (a tape recorder with a tape counter is necessary): simply put the volume higher just before the dropout, and reduce it afterwards.

To test a brand of tape: record a program and see how much the meter flutters when playing it back (it is not necessary to play back into the computer). TDK type D tape is a good reference standard. Some tapes have noticeable but slight fluctuations around a constant average; others have occasional changes of level; others have sudden sharp dips.

If you have a tape recorder with cue and review facilities, there

will be a signal at the EAR connector when pressing the FAST FORWARD or REWIND keys together with the PLAY key. It is very easy to scan through a tape containing several files quickly: the meter needle will drop to zero between files.

If you have trouble loading a particular tape even when the volume is just right, it may be badly recorded.

If you have trouble loading tapes you haven't made yourself, even using the meter, then your tape recorder may need its head azimuth angle adjusting. If you can load other people's tapes but not your own, your recorder is probably unsuitable for computer use. If your computer will work successfully with a program which you have keyed in, it is unusual (but not impossible) for loading problems to be due to the computer.